

March 5, 2007

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD March 5, 2007

A Town Hall meeting of the City of Hopewell, Virginia, was held Monday, March 5, 2007, at 7:00 PM at the John Randolph Foundation, 112 North Main Street, Hopewell, Virginia.

PRESENT: Brenda S. Pelham, Vice Mayor
Christina J. Luman-Bailey, Councilor
Curtis W. Harris, Councilor
Kenneth B. Emerson, Councilor
N. Gregory Cuffey, Councilor

Robert S. Herbert, Interim City Manager
John M. Altman, Jr., Assistant City Manager
Ann M. Romano, City Clerk

ABSENT: Steven R. Taylor, Mayor
E. Randy Sealey, Councilor
Edwin N. Wilmot, City Attorney

STAFF MEMBERS ALSO PRESENT: Chief James Stanley, Hopewell Police Department
Deputy Chief Ray Baxley, Hopewell Police Department
Chief John E. Tunstall, Jr., Hopewell Fire Department
Sheriff Greg Anderson
Deputy Sheriff David Silvestro
Anthony N. Sylvester, Commonwealth's Attorney
David L. Harless, Chief Magistrate
Herbert Bragg, PAC

CITIZEN SIGN-UP SHEET:

Edwin Richard Hanser	1502 Central Lane, Hopewell
Debbie Randolph	400 Cedar Lane, Hopewell
Catherine Edwards	504 Cobblestone Drive, Hopewell
Mark Smith	505 Kippax Street, Hopewell
Murphy Woodruff	314 S. 17 th Avenue, Hopewell
Donna McCoy	507 Appomattox St. , Hopewell
Greg Anderson	312 S. 20 th Ave. , Hopewell
David Harless	512 Central Terrace, Hopewell
A. B. Connolly	617 Mansion Dr. , Hopewell
Wayne & Ann Walton	534 North Ave. , Hopewell
Betty & Bishop Knott	300 Cobblestone Dr. , Hopewell
Sam & Linda Gilbert	606 E. Cawson St. , Hopewell
Debra Rose	3109 Western St. , Hopewell
Ann Williams	3312 St. Charles St. , Hopewell
Cheryl Collins	600 Brown Ave., Hopewell
Marion & Duane Hebert	711 Mansion Dr., Hopewell
Michael & Joyce Pritchard	713 Francis St., Hopewell
Larry & Rita Joyner	711 Francis St., Hopewell
Janice Denton	807 Smithfield Ave., Hopewell
Nina Johnson	807 Smithfield Ave., Hopewell
Ruth & George Baker	502 Cobblestone Dr., Hopewell
Charles L. Steinenger	3905 Yorkshire Place, Hopewell
Ed Pappas	618 Appomattox St., Hopewell
Richard D. Saunders	1005 Bank St., Hopewell

March 5, 2007

Clint Strong	813 Smithfield Ave., Hopewell
Charles Bennett	632 Cedar Level Rd., Hopewell
Paul Karnes	506 Woodland Rd., Hopewell
Don Parr	104 Christopher Newport Dr., Hopewell
Katherine Podlewski	507 N. 2 nd Ave., Hopewell
Homer Eliades	618 Mansion Drive, Hopewell
Ken Munson	Hopewell News

Councilor Bailey opened the meeting at 7:00 PM. She thanked Vice Mayor Pelham, Councilors Harris and Emerson, and staff for coming, and the City Clerk for her help. Addressing the citizens, Councilor Bailey told them that this meeting was all about them. She invited and welcomed questions and suggestions.

HOPEWELL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION EFFORTS

There was a PowerPoint presentation on The Virginia Main Street Program. The presentation covered Design, Promotion, Economic Restructuring, and Organization. There was a question and answer period following the presentation. Rev. Charles Bennett applauded Councilor Bailey's efforts and offered to be the first business to commit to a \$1,500.00 donation of free rides [of his amusement ride equipment] to promote this.

NEIGHBORHOOD BEAUTIFICATION

Councilor Bailey indicated that there have been discussions with the Planning Commission. There are pattern books so that new homes could match those already in the City. There is a Work Session scheduled at our next meeting (March 13, 2007) to discuss tax incentives for property improvement.

Councilor Bailey attended a VML Conference recently and took part in a workshop on Budgeting. She learned the importance of getting information out early and often. The City Manager confirmed that Hopewell already provides a budget document that is available to citizens on line and at the library.

She is trying to improve the relationship between neighborhoods and Code Enforcement. There are ordinances that must be adhered to within the City. Complaints are usually citizen based. The protocol is that the call comes into the City, and then goes to Code Enforcement, who then goes out to serve the Notice. The City Manager credited the Fire Chief for doing a good job. There were several citizens who did not agree.

Edwin Hanser felt that City Council has made many wrong decisions. The boat owners at M dock do not want the roof removed. The boats were towed to the other location which was an added encumbrance to the owners. He urged that the boat lift and the repair shed not be removed. Individuals would have to go 95 miles down river to Norfolk for service. He suggested that local government go back to a four-ward with three at-large City Council; and to consider an elected Mayor by popular vote, not from among the Council itself. He also wanted Council to consider and all at-large Council. The present system was imposed on the citizens by the Federal Government.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Councilor Bailey asked for questions because this was the opportunity to diffuse rumors.

Murphy Woodruff asked about a carport issue on Maryland Avenue and 17th Street. Mr. Altman offered to call him the following day to discuss it with him.

March 5, 2007

Councilor Harris addressed comments/explanation to Mr. Hanser regarding the ward system vs. at-large system for Hopewell City Council.

Councilor Bailey reminded citizens that the Planning Commission, School Board, Dock Commission, etc., are the first line of communication to City Council. Council respects the suggestions that they bring to them. Notices are on the bulletin board on the second floor of the Municipal Building. The Communication from Citizens portion of the Council meeting can be frustrating. There must be a vehicle of communication between the citizens and Council.

Homer Eliades suggested that at Council's next meeting (March 13, 2007) a committee be created comprised of appropriate people from Council members, staff, and citizens. Former City Manager, Clinton Strong, did seek input from citizens during his tenure.

Richard Saunders agreed with Mr. Eliades. He spoke with the current Interim City Manager, who was open to suggestions and comments.

Janice Denton indicated that the City Manager's office, as well as the Police Chief's, have been open to her as well. She felt comfortable and welcome there. She is a member of a group that has recently been named, "Hopewell Citizens for Good Government." They hope that Councilors will attend. George Baker announced that they will meet on March 22, 2007 at the Cobblestone Group House, and the speaker will be Councilor Randy Sealey. They plan to have one City Council member speak at each meeting.

Mr. Hanser spoke again about the at-large voting system for Council. He brought that up because the citizens of Hopewell do not feel that Council is listening. The reason to go back to three at-large is so that they would depend on voters from throughout the City.

Debbie Randolph shared that although Councilor Bailey is her Councilor, she speaks to each Councilor and they have all listened.

Michael Bailey felt that there must be a balance. He does not attend too many Council meetings, but has heard reference to "government at the speed of light." Slow down. Take the time needed. Slow down and don't go at the speed of light. He asked what the budget looks like for the City. The City Manager responded that the document will be presented at the second meeting in March (March 27). It will be on the City's website and at the library. The City is in tight budgetary circumstances.

Joyce Pritchard asked if the budget is ever presented to the citizens (and it is through March, April and May, via Public Hearings and Budget Work Sessions). Councilor Bailey indicated that perhaps another meeting similar to the Town Hall meeting could be scheduled.

Larry Joyner is concerned about mercury. He would like to see an act by Council to see if there is a mercury risk to the human population and what that risk is. Donate a sample of human hair for testing. He wants to know if it is a safe place to live and to raise children. He would like Council to do something in conjunction with EPA to determine if there is a problem, and if so to mitigate it.

There should be citizen input in hiring the new Police Chief.

Mrs. Bishop Knott feels that the City should keep the Interim Police Chief, James Stanley. Many citizens would like to keep him.

Steve Bennett asked when the City would have enough money to take care of all the situations it has. He feels that the citizens will never have a chance to take a break to enjoy living. He complained about the high costs of various permits and licenses within the City. The City is nothing without its people. "When will you be wiser stewards of our money?"

March 5, 2007

Councilor Bailey would like to see quality of life given back to all citizens. Vice Mayor Pelham disagreed. When people pay taxes they pay for what they can afford. Councilor Bailey invited everyone to attend the Budget Work Session sometime in the next 3-4 weeks.

Councilor Emerson addressed his comments to economic development. He is a contractor in the business world. BRAC is a great opportunity for Hopewell. We can prepare for it and be the recipient of tax dollars. There will be lots of development and lots of tax dollars; tax base. It will take tax dollars to get us there but we will get tax dollars back. The restaurants and hotels are expanding, and there are more houses being built. This is a unique opportunity for Hopewell. He thanked citizens for all of their comments.

Former City Manager, Clinton Strong lives in Hopewell. He compared his children's property reassessment outside of Hopewell to his own. He is happy that his property assessment has gone up. Increased property value is good.

Councilor Harris stated that 20 years ago citizens told Council they wanted taxes raised to build new schools. Our school system is now better than anything around here. He hopes we can come to one conclusion. The real meeting is at the polls. At the polls, people will determine whether or not they trust those who were put into office.

Councilor Cuffey has been on Council for nine months. He sees tremendous opportunity with BRAC: Route 36 corridor; downtown; new home development; and prescription program for senior citizens. There is an opportunity for Hopewell to stabilize and move forward. Development is coming. When assessments go up, taxes will come down. It is good to see citizens and hear from them. Call us or contact us any time.

Vice Mayor Pelham offered her time to any former Councilors who were present.

Former Mayor Paul Karnes enjoyed listening to those who spoke. He would like to see Council members smile more.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.